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Distinguished Representatives:

My name is Larry Koepfle. I am the Senior Transportation Planner with the Southwestern Michigan Commission. I am responsible for all federally mandated transportation planning for both the Benton Harbor/St. Joseph Urban Area and the Niles/Buchanan/Cass Urban Area. To be eligible for federal transportation funding, each of the urban areas must work in a coordinated, cooperative and continuing process. Each urban area must produce an approved Long Range Transportation Plan that describes the collective transportation vision for the area. From this document, specific federal aid eligible transportation projects are identified and advanced as the priorities that meet our local needs.

Both urban areas have long histories of working well together. The local road commissions, townships, cities and villages discuss their individual situations and mutual needs on a regular basis. They know that we have limited available funds. They have a strong rapport and respect, which allows them to bring the most needed projects to the top of the local priorities. It is extremely satisfying to be a part of this process.

What is the economic impact of a delayed construction project in Southwestern Michigan?

The completion of the U.S. 31 connection into I-94 (like all the other projects you will hear about) is way overdue. The designed connecting point would be at the Exit 33 into Benton Harbor and St. Joseph. The proposed configuration would allow entering and exiting of commercial vehicles, as well as cars, onto a roadway (BL-94) that can handle this type of traffic. It is a major Economic Development tool that would benefit Benton Harbor and St. Joseph's commercial and industrial efforts. It ties in with the Southwest Michigan Regional Airport and its on-going expansion. I cannot speculate about the millions of dollars this would mean to the Benton Harbor economy, alone. For the Benton Harbor/St. Joseph Area Transportation Study, it is our priority expansion project. *As a commuter on U.S. 31, the completion will mean that I can cut 8 minutes off of my commute time, without speeding.*

Are our vital infra-structure needs being met by current projects?

OUR FUNDING IS WOEFULLY INADEQUATE TO MEET THE REAL NEEDS OF MICHIGAN.

The federal, state and local gas taxes were instituted as means for the users to support the upkeep and improvements to the national, state, and local transportation systems. It is very evident that only the correct amount of gasoline tax revenue will give the federal

and state governments the adequate funding necessary to meet the needs of the people. In recent times, gas prices have fluctuated on an ever-increasing basis to above \$2.00 per gallon at the pump. But the gas tax is static. In fact the total gas tax revenues may be shrinking. It is also very clear that people pay the price of gasoline, no matter who profits. Why should the gas retailers, gas distributors, oil refiners and oil producers be the only ones to profit? Government uses these revenues for fixing and improving the roads and for other forms of transportation. Government is the only one that does. Why shouldn't the people of Michigan who pay for the gasoline also benefit from these increases through better roads, public transit systems, walkways, trains, and even air transports?

A consequence of inadequate funding also means that we are not able to perform the detail of project design and construction to ensure long life spans for our repairs and rehab work. When we think of resurfacing or repairing a road, many people think of grinding off the top layer and applying new material. To really give a road long life, we must also address the drainage along and under the road surface. With limited funds, this becomes one of the casualties of costs. We wind up saying that we will deal with the drainage issue when it gets "really bad". We are all "surprised" when our patchwork doesn't last anywhere near our estimate. Sometimes, we can find ourselves dealing with the same issue one year later, at higher costs.

As an example, Business Loop – 94, known as Lakeshore Drive, in St. Joseph is our priority case for reconstruction in Benton Harbor/St. Joseph. You can experience it all on a drive along the stretch from Maiden Lane north into Benton Harbor. You bump. You drop. You swerve. And, in rain, you can get sprayed and have the underbody of your car soaked in the standing water in the roadway. MDOT and City of St. Joseph road crews have both been working on potholes and the most dangerous areas this year. But they can't keep this up. There are far too many other places that need their help. What is surprising is that the area with the worst flooding and standing water was built in the 1920's and its concrete work is still viable. The lack of adequate drainage has led to the deterioration. Road repairs could have been in terms of replacing concrete panels, if it were not for the drainage issue.

In full belief that U.S. 31 will be connected to I-94 and BL-94 by 2014, it is imperative that BL-94 (known as Lakeshore Drive, Main St. and Ship St. in St. Joseph and Main Street in Benton Harbor) be reconstructed as soon as practical in advance of its completion.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my comments for your consideration.

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